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Christian Service and Responsibility

NOTES OF SHORT ADDRESSES AT THE
MEETINGS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE
PRAYER UNION FROM 1884 TO 1892



BY

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London

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THESE notes of Addresses given at the meetings of the Civil Service Prayer Union from 1884 to 1892 are published in the belief that they will be acceptable to those to whom they were addressed—perhaps also to a wider circle.

Many are very fragmentary, being merely words spoken before or after the general discussion of the subject for the day. But although imperfect, they have not been omitted, as it is felt that those who knew Sir Arthur Blackwood would still wish to have them.

S. M.



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I

REPRESENTATIVES

(May 27, 1884)

WHAT is a representative? It is one who re-presents, presents over again, some other person in a place where that other cannot be. Thus members of Parliament represent their constituencies in the legislature; ambassadors represent their countries at foreign capitals.

Should we not remember that all Christians are representative men? That is, they represent Another where that Other cannot visibly be.

As the high priest of old represented Israel before GOD, bearing upon his heart and upon his shoulders the name of every tribe, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the Representative Man, the Representative of all His Body, the Church, as its Head in glory. We cannot yet be in heaven, and therefore Christ re-

presents us there. In the words of Hebrews ix. 24, "*He appears in the presence of GOD for us*"; or, as in Hebrews vi. 20, "*the Forerunner is for us entered within the veil.*" He is there for us.

So in like manner He cannot be here *visibly*, though we thankfully rejoice to know that He is here *spiritually*. So far as the world can take any cognizance of the presence of Christ, it can only be in so far as He is seen in His representatives. He is the Root, and as the existence of the root can only be discerned by the growth of the branches, and its fertility by their fruit, so Jesus Christ can be taken cognizance of by the world only by the manifestation of His life in and through us. Oh, that that truth were more deeply impressed upon all our hearts—that wherever we are, whatever may be our circumstances in the world, we are ever—we ought ever to be—*representing* the Lord Jesus Christ, *presenting Him* to the world.

There are two passages of Scripture to which these thoughts lead me.

The first is 2 Peter iii. 11, where the apostle asks, "*What manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?*"

The second is in Judges viii. 18, where Gideon says to Zebah and Zalmunna, "*What manner of persons were they whom ye slew at Tabor?*" And let us mark the striking answer, "*As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.*"

"*As thou art,*" they said, "*so were they.*" Oh, that that answer might be given of us! Each one resembling not merely the children of the King, though that is great and glorious, but the King Himself. Such should be the testimony of those with whom we mix in our different departments, in our families and homes, who do not as yet know Him. They should be compelled, nevertheless, by the force of a holy life, by the power of a consistent example, to say of us, "These men are Christians, for they resemble—they are representatives of—Christ."

Now, what are some of the main characteristics of right representation?

In order to ascertain these we must look at the Model, the Pattern, the Divine Prototype of all representation. If I want to know how I should represent Jesus Christ upon earth, I must see how He represents me in heaven.

There are three main features of that representation.

For one thing, it is *continuous*. “*He EVER liveth to make intercession.*” There is no break of continuity in that blessed representation. It never ceases. “*This Man hath an unchangeable priesthood.*” It never breaks down. Oh, what a comfort! I have sinned, but the intercession of Christ does not fail. Before even the consciousness of my sin comes home to me, intercession has been made in glory for me. What an encouragement for me to return! The high priest of old could not put off the breastplate with its twelve jewels from his heart unless he took off the Ephod—the garment “*for glory and for beauty,*” to which it was fastened by laces of blue and chains of gold, “*that it be not loosed from the Ephod.*” Beautiful figure! The Ephod of the high priest represented the resurrection and glory of Christ, as the veil represented His humanity. The veil could be rent—the Ephod could not be rent. It had all the colours and the materials of the veil, with this one addition, that it was inwrought throughout with golden wire, and therefore it could not be torn. The veil was rent at Calvary; but “*Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more.*” He can never put off His Divine glory; and therefore He can never lay aside, never be separa-

ted from those whom He represents. There is not a second in our lives, waking or sleeping, whether distant from or near to Him in our own feelings, there is not a single second when He does not represent us before the Throne. His representation is continuous, steady, everlasting.

Now that throws light on what our representation of Christ on earth should be—*continuous*. Not fitful, spasmodic, or occasional, but steady, regular, consistent. If it be in any measure a true representation, such ought it to be. We may every one of us, I fear, say—How little is that the character of mine! We are tempted to appear as Christians in one society, and to put our light under a bushel in another; often tempted to deny Him, who never denies us, nor is ashamed to call us brethren before “*the Throne of the Majesty in the Heavens*.” Oh, that we might be enabled by our living loving Father to bear this steady witness to the absent Saviour, Whom, though not seeing, we love!

Again, Christ’s representation is *faithful*. “*He is a merciful and faithful High Priest*”—faithful to the interests of those whom He represents. He knows their hearts, their feelings, their circumstances. He leaves out

nothing in His intercession. His representation is thoroughly faithful and sympathizing.

And should not ours too be faithful and sympathizing—sympathizing with the Lord Jesus ; knowing His heart, understanding His feelings, careful and jealous of His interests ? No other representation can be true. Of what use would an ambassador of Great Britain be if he did not represent faithfully the interests of the Empire ? Oh, that we may be faithful to Him who has appointed us, and given us the great honour and dignity of representing Him in this world.

“*Each one*” of these brethren of Gideon “*resembled the children of a king.*” The family likeness could be seen in them all. There was a conformity to Gideon : “*As thou art, so were they.*” And what does the Apostle John say ? “*As He is, so are we in this world.*” We are to be “*transformed by the renewing of our mind,*” conformed to Him that “*He may be the firstborn among many brethren.*” We are to be like unto the Son of GOD. And for this purpose we are endowed with His glory : “*The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them,*” not alluding exclusively, I suppose, to the full development in eternity, but also to the moral glory of the character of Christ

here. It is only then as we set Him forth in His grace, in His truth, in His love, in His sympathy, in His compassion, in His wisdom, in His right judgment—in all these beautiful characteristics of His heart and life,—that we are really representative members of Christ.

And lastly, His representation is an *effectual* one. Because it is continuous and faithful, it is effectual. It always attains its end. It never fails to achieve that for which it is carried on. Not one of His sheep shall be lost, not one of His bones shall be broken, not one of the members of His Body shall perish, because "*He ever liveth to make intercession.*" Therefore it is an effectual ministry for everything for which it is carried on, for pardon, for impartation of life, for preservation, for restoration. The representation of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory is entirely *effectual*.

Should not our representation then be also effectual? That is to say, should it not produce some effect upon the world and upon our brethren? It should be effectual to *impress*. "*I perceive that this is an holy man of GOD which passeth by,*" said the Shunammite woman to her husband. What words those were! "*I perceive that this is an holy man of GOD.*" Should not that be the effect of our

lives? It was said of Simeon of Cambridge, that when he came into a room, people felt, "Here is a man of GOD." How often is our life ineffectual in our offices, in our homes, and amongst our companions. It should produce an impression. It should be such as that produced by Moses when, after six weeks spent on the Mount with GOD, he descended, and his face shone—the inevitable consequence of communion with GOD,—and wrought conviction in the minds of the Israelites.

And it should be effectual to *attract*. St. Peter in the third chapter of his First Epistle, when addressing the wife who has an unsaved husband, urges upon her the necessity of so living "*that he may without the word be won*" by her behaviour. The representation of Christ by His people on earth should be a *winning* representation. Too often it is repellent. There is too much sternness, too much admonition; and how difficult to keep the right mean!

In His life we see the admonition coupled with the compassion, all beautifully harmonized as the colours of the rainbow. If our conversation as representatives of Christ is what it should be, it will be winning, it will attract others. It will win some, even "*with-*

out the word," for they will say of such an one, "I saw by the way he did his business, I saw by the very look upon his face, I could almost tell by the ring of his voice, that there was a supernatural power about that man." When the natives of Malta saw Paul shake off the viper which had fastened on his hand, receiving no hurt, they said, "*He is a god.*" They meant that there was in the man some heavenly power which they could not understand. Should not such be our representation of Christ?

If this, though very brief and imperfect, is anything like a description of what representation of Christ should be, how are we to realize it? Ah! that is the point. It must be as Moses got it—by abiding in communion with GOD up in the Mount. He could not help coming down into the world full of glory. The very glory of GOD shone upon his face, so that people, as they looked at him were amazed. How did Stephen get the same glory? "*He looked up steadfastly into heaven*"; "*and all that sat in the council . . . saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel.*" There was something so heavenly, so angelic about that man as he "*saw the glory of GOD,*" that he reflected it even in that dark place, the High Priest's council

chamber. I believe that that is the only way in which you and I can ever become *representatives* of Christ. Looking at Him, "*beholding as in a glass the glory of the LORD,*" we shall be "*changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD.*" In that way only shall we be able to represent Him, and each one "*resemble the children of a king.*"

DIGGING DEEP

(October 27, 1884)

MATTHEW VII. 24-27

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock :

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock.

"And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand :

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it."

THE subject before us for consideration is a most important one. If ever there was a time when it was needful to look to the foundations, it is the present. There is, it is true, a widespread Christianity, perhaps a wider spread Christianity than there ever has been in the history of the world ; but many of those who observe, and who try to grasp the reality of it, will say that though widespread it is a question whether it is deep. There is so much that is superficial both in work and thought in all classes of society, and the Christianity of the day perhaps partakes of this superficial character.

Therefore a passage of Scripture which leads us each man for himself to look to the foundation, to see that the work in his own soul is real and deep, is one which demands very much interest, thought, and prayer.

The leading thought in the passage, as presented to my mind, is the contrast between the superficial nature of the one man's work, and the depth and reality of the other man's work, and of how much stress is laid in the Word of GOD on the need of the work that has real depth in it, by which I understand *thoroughness*, going right down to the bottom, not being satisfied with anything short of genuine life, and downright genuine work.

Walking past a friend's house the other day, I was surprised to see it closed, and propped up on every side ; it looked as if it were on the point of falling. That was a specimen of foundations insecurely laid—of scamped work. And what is so evident in the works of men in regard to ordinary avocations, is, I am afraid, too common in Christian life.

What God requires is *depth*. In the parable of the sower, in the 13th chapter of this gospel, it is said of one class of unfruitful hearers of the Word that "*the seeds fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth ;*

and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth." In the corresponding passage in St. Luke it is said of this same class, "*It lacked MOISTURE,*" and again, "*These HAVE no ROOT.*"

Let us connect these ideas. "*No depth,*" therefore "*no root.*" "*No depth,*" therefore "*no moisture.*" "*No depth,*" therefore "*no fruit.*"

In the 7th chapter of Isaiah we have an indication that our praying work is to be deep. Isaiah goes to meet King Ahaz, and says to him, "*Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God: ask it either IN THE DEPTH,*"—and in the margin it reads, "*Make thy petition DEEP.*"

Do we make our petitions, our confessions "*deep*"? Oh, how superficial are our prayers! Do we take the pains that a man would take who is determined to lay his foundation only on the rock?

Again, in Jeremiah xlix. 8 we read of "*dwelling deep.*" "*Flee ye, turn back, DWELL DEEP, O inhabitants of Dedan.*" We are to have our dwellings—our abiding places—really deep. We have read of the Grecian sculptor who was fashioning a statue to be placed in a temple, and was working on the hinder part of the figure with great care. It was said to him, "Why do you spend so much labour on the part which will go into the

wall?" "Because," he replied, "the gods can see into the wall." His work must be thorough throughout, because he believed that the gods saw every part.

We do need deep thorough work, but such work is laborious. The man who dug down to lay his foundation on the rock, had to shovel out a good deal of earth. If we are to make deep work in our lives—work that will make room for the moisture from heaven, we must get rid of a great deal of earthliness.

It is beautiful to notice in the corresponding passage in St. Luke, that of the house that is built on the rock, it is said not only that "*it* FELL NOT," but that "*it could not* BE SHAKEN." There is a great deal in these days that shakes men. Because they do not get down to the rock, their principles are shaken, and their lives are inconsistent and vacillating; they are drawn into one extravagance or another. They are not firmly founded on the rock. How often are men governed by expediency in Church matters in Christian work, in family and social arrangements, because they are not established on the rock!

There is great need for men thus grounded and established. How is it with *us*?

In the case of the man whose house was

built upon the sand, there was nothing to hold to, nothing out of sight—all was for show. The secret of the stability of the Eddystone lighthouse is that it grips the rock, is dovetailed into it, forms part of it. The house built on the sand had nothing to *hold to*, nothing wherewith to resist the storm.

The storm here may signify the day of GOD'S wrath, or it may indicate the power of outward circumstances—those things which happen to every one of us in Christian life, when sudden trials and sudden temptations come. If we have nothing *out of sight* to hold to, great will be the overthrow.

It may be that as one grows older the perplexities of life increase; but to me it seems that these days are harder to live in than those in which some of us began our Christian course. I feel that the difficulties in Church matters, in worldly matters, in social matters have increased. The atmosphere seems to be full of temptations, snares, and dangers. So there is great need for downright work, to get deep down on the rock. Everything else must give way, and great will be the fall.

How blessed, how glorious is the life of that man whose foundation being on the rock, his house not only does not *fall*, but "*cannot be shaken*"! How good to see such

an one standing firm when others are going down, holding to his deep conscientious convictions, which are not founded on expediency, nor on the variations of popular opinion, of ecclesiastical thought or modern philosophy, but having such a grasp of eternal life in Christ Jesus that he cannot be shaken. In his soul the Word of GOD has taken such a hold that that Word has permeated his entire being. It is one with him and he with it. What a strong hold is such a man to those who need counsel and help, or over whom he may have influence !

GOD give us all grace to dig deep—to cast out all the earthliness and the worldliness, though it be at great cost. Then we shall know the blessedness of the man described in James i. 25 : “ *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*”

III

GOSPEL LOVE AND ITS PERSONAL OBLIGATION

(July 28, 1884)

MATTHEW XXV. 31-46

"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. . . ."

[Some remarks upon the subject introductory to the full discussion which followed.]

PERHAPS there is no passage of Scripture, even in the Apocalypse, that has given rise to more questions or difference of interpretation than this. . . .

The questions involved are deeply interesting, but on this occasion we are not concerned with their discussion. Our object is to look at the passage in its practical aspect, "GOSPEL LOVE and its *personal obligation*."

That this passage describes a judgment—an award—in respect of such obligation is evident.

The chapter from which the passage is taken seems to be divided into three parts, each of which represents the coming of Christ from a different point of view.

The first describes Him as the *Bridegroom* coming for the Bride—His Church ; the second as the *Master* of the household returning to give awards to His servants for the use of their talents ; and this last describes His coming as the *King*.

It is the only passage, I think, in which the Lord Jesus Christ ascribes to Himself the name "*the King*."

This third part which we are now considering commences in the 31st verse with a word which is not in our translation—"But." "*But when the Son of Man shall come in His glory,*" implying a very great distinction between the two previous events and the present one.

"*But when the Son of Man shall come in His glory,*" it speaks of Him as "*sitting on the throne of His glory.*" He uses the same expression in the 19th chapter of this Gospel, when He speaks of the twelve apostles in session with Himself, "*judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*"

These remarks may throw some light upon the passage ; but the main object we have in view is to see how far we understand and carry out its teaching in its bearing upon our practical duties. All prophetic interpreters of whatever school—all Christians—seem,

more or less, to recognise the teaching of this parable or prophecy, as having a very practical relation to their own lives.

How much has it aroused Christian consciences in all ages of the Church of Christ! How beautifully, how marvellously, it brings before us the truth of that complete identification of the Head with the Body—of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory with His members here on earth, as implied in the words, "*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.*" This truth is brought out again in a later day, when, addressing Saul the persecutor, on his way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus says, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?*" Does it not bring out wonderfully that intimate union, even identity, which exists between the weakest and the poorest and the lowest of the members of His mystical Body, and Himself the Head, and that He is not forgetful of them. "*GOD is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed towards His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*"

Let us endeavour now to gain some light in regard to our privileges and duties, from the way in which our Lord and Saviour looks upon their discharge, as shown in this passage.

IV

LOWLY SERVICE

(July 27, 1885)

JOHN XIII. 1-17

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

"And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him ;

"Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from GOD, and went to GOD ;

"He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments ; and took a towel and girded Himself.

"After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

"Ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

HOW MAY THIS LESSON OF LOWLY SERVICE BEST BE FOLLOWED? WHAT ARE ITS PRINCIPLES?

In opening the conversation in connection with our subject, I would notice two points. The first thought is this : That if we would follow our Saviour's example, it is essential that we should have a *clear realization of our own position in relation to GOD*. It is written of our LORD, just as He was about to perform this act of service, "*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand,*

and that He was come from GOD, and went to GOD"—that is, He was in possession of the full consciousness of His relation to His Father, and of His own dignity, when He stooped to wash the disciples' feet. Now the clearer we are on this point of our relationship, as children, to the living GOD, of our dignity as such, and as joint heirs with Christ, *the lower we shall be able to stoop.*

In the things of this world it is those who have no assured position who cannot afford to stoop. A man who is not clear as to his station in society, is very fearful lest he should degrade himself, and is always afraid of stooping. But the man who knows what his standing is, and that it cannot be prejudiced by any act of service or kindness, is not so hindered. Thus it was with our LORD: "*Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, that He was come from GOD, and went to GOD, He took the towel and girded Himself,*" and stooped to be a Servant to others.

If therefore we are to follow His example, we must seek to maintain a constant and clear sense of our true relationship to GOD: then we shall be able to go down as low as He desires we should go in service to others.

And the second thought is, that if we are

to perform acts of lowly kindly self-denying service for others, *we must ourselves be clean.*

I was reading this morning the 19th chapter of Numbers, which relates to the method of restoration of one who had been excommunicated ; that is, one who had got out of communion with GOD by reason of defilement. He had touched that which was unclean, and had been defiled thereby, and thus shut out from communion with GOD. But GOD had provided the means of restoration. The ashes of an heifer, with water, were to be sprinkled upon him. But it was to be by the hand of one who *was himself clean.* There must be no defilement resting upon the man who was thus to restore him who was defiled.

In the 9th verse we read, "*And a man that is CLEAN shall gather up the ashes of the heifer.*" And in the 18th verse, "*A CLEAN person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave.*"

"*And the clean person*"—the clean person—"*shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day.*"

If my own conscience is defiled, GOD will never use me to restore another. "*If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are SPIRITUAL, restore such an one*"; and if I am not "*spiritual*"—which is not a mere generic name or title, but the description of the actual condition of one in whom the Spirit of GOD is dwelling and habitually working—I *cannot* restore another.

If we are, as in Hebrews x. 24, to "*consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works,*" that consideration of each other must be preceded by "*having the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and the body washed with pure water*"—the whole being, the whole character, the whole life, maintained clean by "*the washing of water by the word,*" and cleansed by the constant application of the blood of Christ.

These, then, are the two points I would bring before you: First, to recollect, to realize our position as children of the living GOD, left here in order to serve one another by love; and secondly, to keep our own consciences and lives clean, if we would be used as instruments for the restoration of those who have wandered and been defiled by contact with the world.

V

CHRISTIAN JOY

(October 26, 1885)

MATTHEW XIII. 44

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

[A few words spoken at the close of a meeting in which many thoughts on the chosen subject had been given.]

THE subject is one fertile indeed. Not only in the texts before us does joy shine forth, but throughout Scripture its pervading influence rejoices the Christian heart; indeed, we may say that Scripture is full of songs.

First let me observe, in regard to the nature of Christian joy, that it is *supernatural*.

As Gerhardt sings—

"My heart in joy upleapeth, grief cannot linger there,
She singeth high in sunshine, amid the glory fair :
The Sun that shines upon me is Jesus and His love,
The fountain of my singing is high in heaven
above."

Paradoxical it may seem, but the Christian's joy is often greatest in tribulation. In

1 Peter i. 8, where "*joy unspeakable*," unutterable, is declared to have been the possession of those to whom the Apostle wrote, it is also recorded that it was theirs when they were "*in heaviness through manifold temptations*" (v. 6).

It has doubtless been the happy lot of many of us to have seen a joy which in its intensity seemed almost more than could be borne, resting upon those who, strong in faith, were passing through an agony of suffering.

Let me say, Don't be looking at your joy. As in first seeking the Saviour you found peace through faith in Him, so also will you find joy. We are "*filled with joy and peace* IN BELIEVING." I am not one who lays much stress upon inward feelings. Don't look within. Look at Christ. And I would add, Not only don't be looking at your joy, but don't look for it. The less we look for feeling the better. The more we look at Christ, the more joy will come to us. But let me remind you that Christian joy is easily hindered. That was a solemn question that Eliphaz put to Job: "*Are the consolations of GOD small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?*" A very little grit will mar the progress of machinery; a very little impurity will dim the brilliancy

of light ; and a very little worldliness will rob the Christian of his joy.

GOD means us to have joy. Think of the advantage it proves to the Church, and through the Church to the world ! Joy is a precious exotic, sent down from heaven to bloom for awhile on earth. It is contagious—manifesting it, we insensibly attract others.

I was called some years ago to speak in a garrison town, and the next day a young man called upon me to tell me of the blessing he had received. Naturally thinking that it might have been through the words spoken, I asked him what had struck him, and how the blessing had come to him. He replied, "It was the happy faces of those young Christian officers." He has now entered into the joy of his LORD, blessed through other Christians' joy.

Christian joy is not barren nor selfish. It leads to great practical results. The joy that we read of in 2 Chronicles xxxiii., made the people go everywhere breaking down the idols that were in the land. So will it ever be. Christian joy will not tolerate sin, and will be active for GOD.

To do full justice to this subject would take not one meeting, but many. Eternity itself will not exhaust it.

How marvellous is it that we, who deserved nothing but wrath, should be made heirs of "*everlasting joy*"! Yet, so it is written: "*The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*"

VI

A SEQUENCE

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST NOT MERELY A
TEACHER, BUT A SACRIFICE

(January 25, 1886)

JOHN III. 1-18

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews :

"The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from GOD : for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except GOD be with him.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

"Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old ?

"Jesus answered . . . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

"Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be ?

"Jesus answered and said unto him . . . As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

"He that believeth on Him is not condemned."

(After many had spoken)

I AM very glad that the connection which subsists throughout the whole of our LORD'S conversation with Nicodemus has been pointed out. It is often overlooked.

We have heard many sermons on John iii. 16 : *"GOD so loved the world that He gave*

His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," and also on the "*lifting up of the Son of Man*," both of which are spoken of in the latter part of the conversation ; but it is very seldom pointed out that the first and the latter parts of the chapter hang together—that the one is the corollary of the other.

Our LORD was, I believe, dealing with the condition of mind in which Nicodemus was, and answering the question which he brought to Him. He came acknowledging Christ as a "*Teacher*," thereby confessing his own need of teaching, and showing his desire to learn something from Him. It is also implied that Nicodemus believed he only needed, as a religious Jew, to be taught a little more than he already knew, and to do a little more than he had already done, to be fitted for the kingdom of heaven. His desire appeared to be like that of the young ruler, "*What good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life ?*"

He was a ruler of the Jews and a teacher of Israel. Our LORD read his character and fathomed his thoughts, and in His own position of Teacher He addressed Himself to the exact state of mind in which Nicodemus

mus was. When he came saying, "Teach me more, shew me what is lacking in my righteousness," our LORD began with the A B C of the Gospel: "'*You must be born again.*' Your best religiousness is of no value. You, a Pharisee, must do the opposite of that which your brethren are doing who reject the counsel of John; you must confess your utter ruin, so utter as to need your burial under the waters of Jordan, as being bad, corrupt, undone. Then, by the power of the Spirit from on high, you must be '*born again, born from above.*'"

This first lesson Nicodemus did not know how to receive. He seems to have felt—What! All my past religious life worthless! I hear of a new birth of the Spirit from above; and that His operations are like the movements of the wind—incomprehensible. "*How can these things be?*"

Nicodemus is thus brought just where the LORD would have him to be brought—to a confession of utter ignorance and helplessness as a sinner. Then He answers the real longing of the man's heart, "How shall I obtain eternal life?" He tells him he must look to a crucified Saviour, he must trust in the Son of Man "*lifted up.*"

In His statement about "*the lifting up of*"

the Son of Man," the Lord Jesus clearly points to a propitiatory sacrifice. He refers to the Serpent in the wilderness, and why? Why did GOD direct the Serpent to be made use of by Moses, and why was the Serpent employed as a type? It was because the Serpent was the emblem of the curse of GOD.

The 3rd chapter of Genesis and the 3rd chapter of Galatians give us the secret. To the Serpent was said, "*Cursed art thou,*" but now "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*" The Serpent, the emblem of Satan, was therefore presented as the type of the Saviour hanging on a tree, "*made a curse for us.*"

The whole conversation thus attains beautiful consistency.

If, like Nicodemus, we are willing to accept Jesus as a Teacher, we cannot stop short of Jesus as a Sacrifice. An awakened conscience must have a sacrifice. There is the kernel of the whole matter. If the Holy Ghost has really convinced us of sin and made us feel its burden and its terrible guilt, we can never find peace till we take our place "under the shadow of the Cross," and experience the power of the Blood which "*cleanseth us from all sin.*"

VII

STILL UPWARD

(April 12, 1886)

Friends have been puzzled to know where the passage on which I am to address you is to be found. The words "STILL UPWARD" occur three times in one verse.

EZEKIEL XLI. 7

"AND there was an enlarging and a winding about STILL UPWARD to the side chambers; for the winding about of the house went STILL UPWARD round about the house; therefore the breadth of the house was STILL UPWARD, and so increased from the lowest chamber to the highest by the midst."

There is much which is peculiar in this verse; and I do not profess to be a better expositor of the secrets of Ezekiel's temple than any others whose works I have read. But I am not going to dwell upon the literal application of the passage; I want you to take the words more as a motto. It is a

motto which we shall find fully worked out in other books of the Bible.

There is one passage in particular which seems to set the three "UPWARDS" of the Christian life in a very concrete form. *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of GOD. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in GOD. When Christ, Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory"* (Col. iii. 1-4).

Here we have the three "upward" movements that occur in the life of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the COMMENCEMENT, the CONTINUATION and the COMPLETION of the Christian life.

We have the COMMENCEMENT—RISEN WITH CHRIST. That was the first upward movement in your soul. You were quickened by the Word of Truth, as was Lazarus when in the grave he heard the voice of the Son of GOD. You were quickened by the sight of Christ, and looking to Him you lived. You were quickened by the power of the Holy Ghost, Who raised Him from the dead, thus declaring Him to be the Son of GOD with power. The same Spirit has

exercised His marvellous operations in our souls ; and now, though once dead in trespasses and sins, we have been "*quickened together with Christ,*" and not only quickened, but as we are taught in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "*raised up together with Him.*" Oh, what an upward movement was that when we were "*brought up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay,*" and had "*our feet set upon a rock.*" That was the commencement. But it was only the commencement of an upward life ; born from above in order that we might "*seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of GOD.*"

Next we have the CONTINUATION of the Christian life. As there was "*an enlarging*" and increasing and widening in those mysterious chambers by the walls of Ezekiel's temple, so it is intended that there should be an increasing and widening and enlarging of the Christian life, if we are in any sense true Christians—not only in profession, but in practice. Our whole life should be one of which the motto and principle ought to be, "*Still Upward, Still Upward.*" And in this passage to the Colossians we are taught that this takes place by two processes.

First, there is the attraction upward.

Whither? To Christ Himself, "*where He sitteth at the right hand of GOD.*" For the believer is not only one whose "*life is hid with Christ in GOD,*" a citizen of a heavenly country; but where his treasure is, there his heart will be also.

He has been attracted to Christ, and drawn to Him; and now, wherever and whenever he leads a true proper and normal Christian life, it is a life which is "*Still Upward.*" He is attracted to Christ; but he is not only *attracted* to Him as the true Centre of his life—for before, he was moving in a wrong orbit; but he is also *attached* to Christ with the attachment of a new love, a Divine love, the love of GOD let down into his heart in order to lift him up. Where Christ his Treasure is, there also will be his heart. Like the jewels upon the breastplate of old, bound with chains of gold and laces of blue upon the High Priest's heart, so the believer's resting-place is there, never to be separated from the love of Christ; attached to Him by the power and love and grace of His Heavenly Father.

The other process, which it seems to me the passage teaches, is one of *detachment*. The two necessarily go together. Where there is a strong *attachment*, there is neces-

sarily a strong *detachment* from other objects. When the believer's heart is true to Christ, there must be a continual breaking off from the lower objects, and certainly from the sinful objects of his previous life. So the Apostle says, "*Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.*"

Is not this always true in natural things? As the corn ripens to heaven, it dies to earth. As the balloon, filled with the power that shall lift it up above the earth, is on the point of rising, it must first have all the cords cut. If the ship is to reach the shores of a distant land, the anchor must first be weighed.

And so it is with us, dear friends, if we are seeking the better land, the glory of our Lord and Saviour. If our hearts are "surely there fixed where true joys are to be found," then there will be a continual process of dying, and of breaking off from the things which have held us down here. This will be going on continually. The more we comprehend the inexhaustible riches which are in Christ, that He has "*loved us with an everlasting love,*" and realize the bottomless abyss of joy and bliss to be found in Him, the more we shall feel with St. Paul when he wrote, "*I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD in Christ Jesus.*"

We need to be reminded of these things. We all know what a power there is in the things of time and sense to draw us down. How cunning is the enemy! how vast his resources! How true of us is that which the man of GOD expressed of old, "*My soul cleaveth unto the dust*"! How we need the constant gracious energy of GOD the Holy Ghost, quickening us according to His word, to lift us above the fogs and mists, the attractions and allurements of this world, the "*fashion of which passeth away*," in order that our lives may be more like the description of the prophet, "*mounting up like eagles*"; and that there should be more of the "*Still upward*," of the attachment in heart and mind to Christ; of the dying to earth, and of the realization of our hidden life with Him.

This seems to me to be the *continuation* of the upward Christian life.

But there is the COMPLETION still to come.

What will that "*Still Upward*" be? How will it be accomplished? "*Behold, I show you a mystery.*"

"*The LORD Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of GOD; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.*"

"*Then we which are alive and remain, shall*

be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air."

That will indeed be "*Still upward.*"

"Sun, moon, and stars forgot,
Upward I fly."

Then we shall "*see Him as He is.*" He will "*call His saints together unto Him, those that have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice.*" His closing prayer, "*Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am,*" answered through eighteen centuries again and again, as one after another of His redeemed people has passed away and entered into His sanctuary, will have its crowning fulfilment when those who have been washed in His blood, and redeemed by His grace, are presented before His Father's presence.

Oh, what a moment of transcendent joy, of ineffable bliss! Fancy cannot picture it; no eyes have seen, nor ears heard, "*neither have entered into the heart of man the things which GOD hath prepared for them that love Him.*" He has partly "*revealed them unto us by His Spirit.*" He makes them to pass before us, "*through a glass darkly.*" But when that moment comes, how your utmost dreams of bliss will be exceeded when you realize

that holiness is yours—*that* for which you have longed, likeness to Christ, in body, soul, and spirit. No temptation, no weariness, no sorrow, no sin—“*satisfied with His likeness.*”

Shall we not say, as we contemplate that COMPLETION, that closing scene which most certainly awaits the earthly life of every one who has been brought from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, and is now seeking to grow into the likeness of his Saviour, “Lord, hasten the time.” “*Lord Jesus, come quickly.*”

May that motto, those words, “*Still upward,*” be graven on our hearts. May its principles more and more actuate and energize our lives, till He calls us, either by death or by His glorious return, to mount up into the region of eternal glory and joy, to be “*For ever with the LORD.*”

VIII
FRUITFULNESS

(July 26, 1886)

JOHN XV. 1-8 AND 16

"I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman.

"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away : and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.

"I am the Vine, ye are the branches : He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit : for without Me ye can do nothing.

"If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be My disciples.

"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain : that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you."

OUR subject is a vast one, and various lines of study open out from the verses just read ; but we shall concentrate our thoughts on the one main subject suggested for our consideration :

"FRUITFULNESS THROUGH ABIDING IN CHRIST."

In studying the Scriptures, it is often very

helpful to notice the repetition of certain words. Such repetition is the mode in which it pleases GOD to lay stress upon any particular thought. Now here we find that, on the one hand, the personal pronouns concerning Christ, "*I*," "*Me*," and "*My*"; and on the other hand, the personal pronouns concerning His people, "*Ye*," "*You*," "*Your*," are repeated no less than twenty-one times in these sixteen verses. Again, the word "*fruit*" is repeated no less than eight times; and the word "*abide*," or its equivalents "*continue*" or "*remain*," is repeated twelve times.

This repetition emphasizes the fact that the main thought running through the whole passage—the central thought—is that of the union of Christ with His people, of His people with Him, and of their fruitfulness as "*branches in the Vine*."

Then we have in the second verse, "*fruit*" and "*more fruit*"; in the fifth verse "*much fruit*"; in the eighth again, "*much fruit*"; and in the sixteenth verse, "*abiding fruit*,"—"*That your fruit should REMAIN*."

Fruitfulness, it seems then is the object, the main purpose, of the Christian life. It is not life only; not merely that we should live as branches, but that we should "*bring forth*

fruit." The fig tree was *alive*, but it bore no fruit. Life is the necessary preliminary to fruit-bearing, but it is not the end. Fruit-bearing is the end, the object ; and to that, as we read in the 16th verse, all are "*ordained.*"

Every Christian man is an "*ordained*" man : every Christian woman is an "*ordained*" woman. We are all "*ordained*" by the fact of our Christianity, our Christship in Him. And we are "*ordained*" in order to "*go and bring forth much fruit.*"

One main reason for fruitfulness—the object, indeed, with which every believer has been redeemed, saved, quickened, and united to Christ,—is that he may exhibit, manifest Christ to the world. As the root of a tree is hidden, so Christ, "*the Root,*" is invisible to the world now ; and just as the life that is in the root of the tree can only be manifested by the branches and their fruitfulness, so the only way in which the Lord Jesus Christ can now be exhibited to the world is by the fruitfulness of His branches—of all who are believers in Him.

What a responsibility, what a dignity, what an honour that every believer is ordained by the will of the Father, by the death of Christ, and by the anointing of the Holy

Ghost, for the express purpose of manifesting to the world the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Root of the true Vine.

And so we read, and naturally so, that fruitfulness glorifies the Father : "*Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*" And to that agrees what St. Paul says in Philippians i. 18, where he speaks of "*being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of GOD.*" Not to the glory and praise of man—the branch ; but to the glory and praise of the Father through the Son.

Again, fruitfulness brings further blessing upon the branch that bears the fruit. This we learn from the 16th verse : "*That your fruit should remain*" ; and then as a further result, "*That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you.*" An unfruitful Christian, then, gets but little answer to his prayers. A Christian, whose fruit is much and abiding, is entitled on this very principle to look for large, and we may say, almost invariable answers to his prayers.

To this agree the words of Hebrews vi. 7 : "*The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed*"—and we remember Who the Husbandman is—that

ground, that plot "*receiveth blessing from GOD.*"

Fruitfulness then is the condition of further blessing, and further blessing of more fruitfulness; and so there is, or ought to be, a constant culmination in the life of the Christian, ever leading to more and more blessing from GOD.

It seems, from the 9th and 10th verses, that "*Abiding in Christ*" is equivalent to the "*Continue ye in My love.*" "*If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love.*" And this corresponds with what St. Jude says: "*Keep yourselves in the love of GOD,*" as in the atmosphere by which you are surrounded, the element in which you live and move and have your being.

What a delicious climate to live in! We shall want no change of air when we continue in that climate, "*The love of Christ which passeth knowledge.*"

And then, this abiding in Christ seems, from the 10th verse, to be conditional upon obedience to Christ. "*If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love.*" The words in the 4th verse: "*Abide in Me, and I in you,*" convey a command and a promise. He *commands* us, and He Himself *promises*, "*Abide in Me, and I (will) abide in you.*"

And that abiding of Christ in us is equivalent to His words abiding in us: "*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you*" (v. 7).

Abiding involves *a right situation*. "*Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well*" (Gen. xlix. 22). It is the tree "*planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season*" (Ps. i. 3); and in Jeremiah xvii. 8: "*The tree that spreadeth out her roots by the river shall not cease from yielding fruit.*" When Job describes what the fruitfulness of his life had been before his trials came upon him, he says (chap. xxix. 19), "*My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branches.*"

Thus through the Root is the connection between the branch and the supply of the element of life, in other words, of the living power of the Holy Ghost, for "*this spake He of the Spirit.*"

In the next place, Abiding in Christ involves *dependence upon the Root*, for "*The Root beareth thee*" (Rom. xi. 18). "*Thou partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree.*" Nothing can come to the branch but through the root—"Without Me, ye can do nothing." "*I am the root and the offspring of David.*"

And again, this Abiding in Christ for fruitfulness involves *the paternal care of the Great*

Husbandman. "My Father is the Husbandman," and "every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it." This involves very great closeness of the Husbandman's hand. The gardener is never so near the vine as when he is pruning it. This is a very precious thing to remember. If we are subjected to chastisement, if He "*dealeth with us as with sons*," if the pruning knife is put in, if trial comes, remember it is the Father's hand, and He is very close then. In all the troubles which press upon us, every one of a different kind, what a comfort to know He is closest to us when He is using the pruning knife !

There is yet one other thought in the deep utterance of Christ to the Greeks who came to see Him, "*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*" This involves the very essence of fruit-bearing. Ah ! dear friends, there is not much fruit-bearing without death ! It is a very pleasant thing to bear fruit ; but it is a serious thing to die. As one has said, "It is an easy thing to envy the results of discipline, but it is another thing to bear the discipline which leads to the results." You say, "I wish I could win souls like some." You don't know, perhaps, how such an one was disciplined

before being used. I do not suppose that any of us has got to the bottom—and perhaps most of us know but little—of the meaning of that word, “*But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*”

As we leave the consideration of this subject, we shall, I am sure, feel humbled ; but I trust also encouraged to ask GOD to teach us to know more of “*abiding in Christ,*” the secret of Christian fruitfulness.

IX

TRUE KNOWLEDGE AND THE
ONLY TEACHER

(October 25, 1886)

JOHN III. 1-8 ; XVI. 6-15

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

"And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

"Of sin, because they believe not on Me ;

"Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more ;

"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

"Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth : for He shall not speak of Himself ; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak : and He will shew you things to come.

"He shall glorify Me : for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you."

OUR subject is, THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST, *to be obtained and preserved through the Holy Ghost alone.*

We cannot have a more spiritual subject, nor, in its place, a more important one. A very humbling one too, if we look at it rightly ; for it makes GOD everything, and

the believer nothing. It deprives us of every ground of self-assertion, self-reliance, or boasting, and casts us entirely upon GOD.

If "*a man can RECEIVE nothing except it be given him from heaven*"; and if he can keep nothing except the power to keep it be given him, surely the work must be GOD'S, and the glory must be GOD'S, from beginning to end.

The knowledge of GOD in Christ may be said to be the Alpha and Omega of Christianity, to impart which was one of the purposes for which the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth. "*We know that the Son of GOD is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may KNOW Him that is true*" (1 John v. 20).

The knowledge of Jesus is eternal life: "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true GOD, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*" (John xvii. 3). Eliphaz tells us that the sure way to be at peace with GOD is acquaintance with Him: "*Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace*" (Job xxii. 21).

Again, Peter tells us that it is only "*through the knowledge of GOD and of Jesus our LORD*" that "*grace and peace*" can be "*multiplied*" to us (2 Pet. i. 2). Not only so, but also that "*All things that pertain unto life and godliness*" are given to us "*through the knowledge*

of Him Who hath called us to glory and virtue" (v. 3). St. Paul could pray for nothing greater, nothing more advanced for the Ephesian believers, than the knowledge of GOD. In Ephesians i. 17 he prays, "That the GOD of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may KNOW."

That was the *summum bonum* of Christian doctrine and Christian experience. And what Paul prayed for so earnestly on behalf of others he sought for himself, as the main object of his life. He says in Phil. iii. 8-10, "*I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*"

The verses to which I have referred—and there are many more—show us "*the excellency of the knowledge*" of the Lord Jesus Christ. They teach us that eternal life, enjoyment of peace, the possession of all things that pertain to life and godliness—everything, in fact, is summed up in the knowledge of GOD in Christ.

We come now to the consideration of the truth: "That this knowledge can only be

communicated and preserved by THE HOLY GHOST."

It is He Who first leads us to the knowledge of GOD : it is He Who "*convinces the world of sin.*" It is the conviction which the Holy Spirit produces in the sinner's heart that leads him to repentance and to seek salvation, revealing to him, finally, Jesus Christ as the Saviour. We are taught that so exclusively is this the work of the Spirit that "*No man can say that Jesus is the LORD but by the Holy Ghost*" (1 Cor. xii. 3).

All who are engaged in Christian work are again and again brought face to face with this solemn truth. How often, when trying to lead fellow-sinners to Christ, we have put before them the doctrines we believe in the clearest, and as we think, in the most striking way ; and again and again have we found that it has not been in our power to bring one jot or one tittle of those truths home to the heart, nor to lead the sinner decisively to GOD. We have been thrown back upon the resources of GOD, and made to feel that if ever one for whom we have been praying is brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and to acknowledge Him as the LORD, it must be "*by the Holy Ghost.*"

Is not that humbling to us and glorifying to GOD ?

What has just been said deals with the *Commencement* of the knowledge of Christ, whether it be the conviction of sin or the acceptance of Christ as Saviour and LORD.

But there is a further truth contained in this subject, and it is this : That it is only "*by the Holy Ghost*" that the knowledge of GOD is *preserved*.

If we look at the passages in St. John's Gospel—the Gospel which deals more than any other with the subject—we find the work of the Holy Spirit described in chapter xvi. 26 as "*teaching us all things, and bringing all things to our remembrance.*" Therefore, if truth is brought to our memory ; if we are reminded of our responsibility to GOD, of the reality of the Person and presence, the grace, the sympathy, the power and love of GOD in Christ, it is not to any effort of our own we owe it, but to GOD the Holy Ghost. So also it is He Who is "*to testify of Christ,*" "*to guide into all truth,*" "*to shew things to come*" (John xv. 26 and xvi. 13) ; and again in verse 14 : "*He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.*"

Now, this work of the Holy Spirit must be a *continual* one. We are as much dependent upon the teaching, guidance, and revelation of the Holy Ghost when we have been

Christians for fifty years as we were when first we were led to Christ as our Saviour. It is most important to remember this, because insensibly we are apt to get into a condition of mind which is inclined to imagine that having a firm grip intellectually of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and having besides learnt to know Christ as our personal Saviour, we are therefore able to depend a good deal upon ourselves. Not that we would venture to say or feel that we can be independent of the Holy Ghost. No ; but that a great deal depends upon ourselves. In a certain sense this is of course the case. But if the truth of GOD is to be brought home to our hearts with power, if we are to live in the enjoyment of the presence of Christ, it must be by the constant teaching of the Holy Ghost. By many failures, many humiliations, much self-emptying, we have to learn this. We cannot keep a doctrine, we cannot keep the truth, we cannot for one moment keep a vital experimental hold of Christ except "*by the Holy Ghost.*"

St. Paul's injunction to Timothy is peculiarly apposite and full of the deepest teaching: "*That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost.*" Timothy might have thought that he was grounded in

the truth, and could be trusted to keep "*that good thing*" by his own will. But no. Paul says it must be "*by the Holy Ghost.*"

Oh, my friends, how this throws us back upon GOD! How it brings, or ought to bring, us down to the dust! "*A man can receive nothing,*" and we may add a man can keep nothing, "*but by the Holy Ghost.*"

I would only add now one thought: That it seems to be taught us in various passages of Scripture that it is under the distinct teaching of the Spirit of GOD *alone* that we get really high deep extended views of the glory of GOD.

Ezekiel, like the Apostle John, was favoured with wonderful visions of the glory of GOD. It was when John was "*IN THE SPIRIT on the LORD'S day*" that he saw all those visions which were communicated to him. So it was with Ezekiel, the John of the Old Testament. In chapter i. 26 we read that he saw the throne of God, and on the throne was "*the likeness as the appearance of a man,*" and this was (v. 28) as the "*appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*" In chapter iii. 12, 14, he says, "*THE SPIRIT took me up;*" "*THE SPIRIT lifted me up, and took me away.*" In verse 24: "*THE SPIRIT entered into him and set him upon his feet.*" And again in chapter

viii. 3 : "THE SPIRIT *lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in the visions of GOD to Jerusalem.*" Again, in chapter xi. 1 : "*Moreover, the Spirit lifted him up, and brought him to the east gate of the LORD'S house ;*" verse 5 : "THE SPIRIT *fell upon him ;*" and in verse 24 : "THE SPIRIT *took him up, and brought him in a vision* BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD *into Chaldea.*"

All this seems to bear out what I am trying to show—that the vision of the glory of GOD is only communicated to us with power "*by the Holy Ghost.*" And that glory of GOD, we are told distinctly, is "*in the face of Jesus Christ.*"

How beautiful it is to remember that even the reception and the enjoyment of the fresh manna day by day was in connection with the fresh dew which fell from heaven ! We know that the dew is one of the symbols employed to denote the work of the Spirit of GOD. Every night, we read in Exodus, "*When the dew fell upon the camp the manna fell upon it.*" Every morning when the dew went up the children of Israel got their fresh food—angels' food—the bread of heaven.

X

FAITH'S CONFIDENCE

(April 25, 1887)

ROMANS VIII. 28, 29

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love GOD, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren."

(After many had spoken)

IT is important, dear friends, to remember that the predestination or election spoken of in these verses is not solely election to salvation, but is election to "*conformity*." It deprives the opponents of the doctrine of predestination of much ground if it be seen that GOD does not only predestinate to salvation from hell, but also to conformity "*to the likeness of His Son*."

A word has been used several times during the meeting with regard to the 28th verse, which I do not find there. "All things *shall* work together for good to them that love GOD." It is well to be accurate, because even the tenses of Scripture are important. The word *shall* is not in the verse. It says: "*all things work together for good*"—are working now ; not merely they shall work.

Our comfort, then, is to know that all things *are* working together for our good.

Let me give a simple illustration of this. If I take out my watch and open it at the back, I see several wheels going in opposite directions. What confusion apparently is here! But if I turn the watch and look on the other side, I see that all this apparent confusion is working together to produce a definite result.

So is it in our lives, and in the greater spheres around us—wheel within wheel, apparent confusion everywhere. All things may seem to be “*against us*,” as Jacob said. At such times it is a great comfort to remember that such things, at the very moment when they seem most adverse, not only *shall* work, but *are* working together for our good.

St. Paul says, “*we know*,” not “*we hope*.” For, writing to the Philippians (chap. i.), he says, when speaking of bonds and imprisonment, “*I KNOW that this shall turn to my salvation*,” “*We KNOW that all things work together for good to them that love GOD*”; and as has been pointed out, “*good*” is not comfort, nor happiness, nor prosperity, nor even eventually salvation and enjoyment of eternal pleasures, but conformity to Christ. That is the chief good. We misapprehend and underestimate

things when we fail to see that the greatest good that can happen to you or to me is to be "*conformed to the image of Christ.*"

I like to connect this thought in the 28th verse with Philippians 1. 12, where Paul says : "*I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel.*"

He seems here to get on a still higher platform. He gets away from the consideration of things working together for his own personal good, to something more—"the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel." How can that be? He answers, "*My bonds are manifest in all the palace.*" Christ is thus being preached there, as could never otherwise have been the case. In his shipwreck? Yes ; for he then preached to "*two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.*" When the viper fastened on his hand? Yes ; for then again he preached the Gospel. So, on to the end of his life, "*The things which happened unto him fell out unto the furtherance of the Gospel.*"

What a marvellous thought it is that each child of GOD is so linked and united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus to His Gospel, that "*the things which happen to him,*" his

position, his life, his official difficulties, his domestic trials, his pleasures, his opportunities, all "*fall out to the furtherance of the Gospel.*" You are identified with the Gospel of Christ, and you cannot help it. Thank GOD you are so identified with Christ's Gospel, that what happens to you has its bearing upon the extension of the kingdom of GOD. How beautiful it is to trace this in the things that have happened unto us. No doubt all of us can look at our lives, and see that our times of health or sickness, our daily work, our recreations, "*the things that have happened to us have fallen out unto the furtherance of the Gospel.*"

What dignity this gives to our humble lives, and to the little obscure spheres we occupy! Oh, they have grand significance in heaven—mighty consequences in the view of angels, "*who desire to look into these things.*" Let us look at them ourselves from this point of view.

To return to Romans viii. Let me remark here that there are three "*all things*" in these verses.

In verse 28: "ALL THINGS *working together for good to them that love GOD.*"

In verse 32: "ALL THINGS *freely given to us*" with Christ.

In verse 37: "*In ALL THESE THINGS we are more than conquerors*"—"a threefold cord" which cannot be "*quickly broken*."

"*All things*" working together for good; "*all things*" given to us freely with Christ (without Him nothing); and "*all these things*"—oppositions, trials, persecutions, difficulties, giving occasion for the final triumph—nay, the *present* triumph, for "*We ARE more than conquerors*."

And then the ground of our confidence—"For us"—occurs three times in these verses. In verse 31: "*If GOD be FOR US, who can be against us?*"

In verse 34: "*Christ Who is at the right hand of GOD, Who also maketh intercession FOR US*."

In verse 26: "*The Spirit maketh intercession FOR US*."

Another threefold cord!

May we thank GOD for such a ground for confidence, taking up that triumphant challenge of the Apostle:

"*If GOD be for us, who can be against us?*"

XI

FAITH'S VICTORIES

(July 25, 1887)

HEBREWS XI. 23-40

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days."

(At the close of the Meeting)

I WOULD add a thought or two. One is: The victories of faith may be, and often are, wrought as much by standing still as by going forward. *"The walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days."* It needed the seven days' patient waiting outside Jericho, before the triumphant shout of faith was uttered, and the walls fell.

So in Hebrews vi. 12 we read that we are to be *"followers of them who through faith and PATIENCE inherit the promises."*

It is easier sometimes to shout and to go forward in some energetic work than to patiently wait for GOD. We are told that when the Israelites came out of Egypt, *"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by*

dry land"; but it needed as much faith to obey the command of Moses to "*Stand still and see the salvation of GOD*," as to put their feet into the chasm opened by the retreating waters. Oh! it often needs more faith to wait quietly than to act.

We have been speaking of how faith can be increased. Faith is not increased by analysing it, nor by looking at it. The chief way, it seems to me, is by having more to do with Him who is the Object of faith.

It should be remembered that faith is only the eye by which we contemplate the Object of faith. If we were considering the heavens on some clear night, and instead of concentrating our attention on the object at which we were gazing, were to be occupied with analysing the structure of our eyes or of the telescope, we should look in vain.

We often get wrong ideas when we think so much of our faith, instead of considering Him Who is the Object of it. It is "*considering the Apostle and High Priest*," "*looking unto Jesus*," that we are to run the race.

And if we study this chapter, what do we find concerning these mighty heroes of faith? This—that *they had so much to do with GOD*. This runs through all their lives, and is the secret of their faith.

Enoch "*walked* WITH GOD," and therefore his faith was strong. Abraham had much to do with GOD, and therefore he *obeyed*. Moses, we are told, "*endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible.*"

If we had more to do with GOD Himself as a personal living present loving Saviour and LORD—One able to deliver us in every difficulty, One Whose heart beats with every thought of ours, Who sympathises with us in every trouble, Who knows the way out of every perplexity into which His Providence allows us to be brought; if we had more to do with Christ—then our faith would grow, not by looking at it, nor even by praying for its increase, but by unconscious exercise. The more we have to do with the Object of faith, the more will our faith inevitably increase.

I have never forgotten what I once heard of the course taken with a person who was anxious about her soul. Many had sought to lead her into peace with GOD, and the effort had been to lead her to *trust*. Her reply always was, "I cannot trust. I don't know how to trust." Her mind was occupied with her own faith; she was considering her own trust, and she remained in darkness. But another friend, wiser to see her actual con-

dition, put the same question with a new meaning, by saying, "Can't you trust *Him*?" and thus her thoughts were turned from her own trust to the *Person* to be trusted.

It is when we look at the *Person* that we are compelled to trust. It is knowing the character which enables us to trust. The wife cannot help trusting her husband, nor can we help trusting a friend whose trustworthiness admits of no doubt.

The victory is gained by keeping the eye fixed upon Christ, occupied with *Him*. It is when we look away from Him that faith grows weak. It is the contemplation of a living personal present Saviour that will strengthen faith.

When the Apostles prayed, "*Lord, increase our faith*"—a prayer one is ready enough to utter—what did the LORD say? "*If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.*" It is not more faith you need, but to use what you have, and you will find miracles in answer. Growth is not in praying for the development of faith, but in exercising what we already possess. We may lie on a couch, and pray for an increase of strength; but it

is when we use our limbs that we find our powers increase.

What is the main method by which we can grow in this knowledge of GOD, this personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ? Through the use of the Word of GOD. If we neglect that Word, if we hurry over its reading, faith must go down. It is only in proportion as our souls feed upon the Living Word as revealed in the Written Word, that our faith will really grow, and that we shall find ourselves through that means overcoming the world.

XII

SOME FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN
UNION

(January 30, 1888. Edinburgh)

ISAIAH XLI. 6, 7

"They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage.

"So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheneth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved."

AS the Israelites went down to the camp of the Philistines to sharpen their axes and coulters, so from the utterances even of bad men, recorded in Scripture, important lessons may be learned. The lesson here is of the value of association for mutual encouragement.

Let me point out some of the important features of Christian Union.

First, IT IS THE PRINCIPLE WHICH GOD ENJOINS.

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

"For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.

. . . "And if one prevail against him, two

shall withstand him ; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. iv. 9-11).

We are so constituted that we need mutual support.

Secondly, IT IS THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED.

For this was, "*That He might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad*" (John xi. 52). And it was for this that the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven. He came to baptize believers into one body, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is Head (1 Cor. xii. 13).

Thirdly, IT IS THE PRACTICE WHICH GOD BLESSES.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ! . . . For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 3). Oh, how GOD blesses practical union ! We hear now a great deal said about union. People say that they "believe in the Communion of Saints," but often in practice they believe in union only with their own religious body. I believe that in these days GOD is signally marking His approval of union in Christ, where our sectarian differences and our distinguishing features of Church government are lost sight of and swallowed up in the

overwhelming and absorbing sense of a united body of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head.

Fourthly, IT IS ALSO THE POWER WHICH GOD USES.

It is an union which makes us come together in the Name of Jesus, loving one another, keeping step together like those "*of Zebulon which could keep rank*," which is Power.

There is a great iron bridge which spans the St. Laurence, which has been tested by the imposition of enormous weights, in order to prove its absolute security ; and yet, when a regiment of men marches over, they must break step. The swing of their united tramp might bring the bridge to ruins. What a lesson !

How GOD Himself recognises the power of union, even for the accomplishment of evil ! When for the first time men were confederated together to defeat the purpose of GOD, He said, "*Behold, the people is one . . . and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do*" (Gen. xi. 6).

So, let every one of us "*help his brother and encourage his neighbour, and say : BE OF GOOD COURAGE.*"

XIII
DIVINE EQUIPMENT

I. POWER

(April 30, 1888)

EPHESIANS I. 19

"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."

WHAT a subject for consideration ! How it stirs and I hope inspires and stimulates our hearts to review such a passage ! What possibilities it suggests What openings illimitable !

Power is what we want. Faith, as we have been hearing, is one of the conditions on which it is to be attained ; but there is another which should not be forgotten, and that is *Consciousness of need*.

Have we got that ? It is to the "*faint*" that "*He giveth power.*" It is "*the weak*" who are to say, "*I am strong.*" We do not need to *feel* strong in order to *be* strong in Christ : for it is written, "*When I am weak, then am I strong.*"

Many of us are conscious of our lack of strength. As we think of what to-morrow

may bring ; as we consider our official work, our home duties, we feel, Oh, that I could exercise this power ! How am I to get it ? It has been pointed out that in order to receive and maintain this power, we must be separate from the world. How we find this great truth illustrated in the Word of GOD ! It was when Samson was separate—as a Nazarite from his birth—that he was stronger than all that came against him. It is in separation of heart and soul unto GOD that we shall find strength.

And it is through the Word of GOD that this power is obtained : “ *When He had spoken unto me, I was strengthened.* ” It is by being in contact with and making the Word of GOD part of ourselves that we receive power ; it is by immediate contact with Christ, in consciousness of our need and recognition of His fulness that we find strength.

And it is in recognition too of the fact that He has need of us in order that His power may be manifested : “ *The Head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you,* ” and our great exalted glorious Head cannot say to the feeblest of His members upon earth, “ *I have no need of thee.* ” He wants you and me as members of His body, in order to exhibit His power here on earth.

For what is this power to be used ?

For *Witnessing*, for *Work*, and also for *Waiting*.

Perhaps more power is needed for Waiting than for Working, or for direct Witnessing, though Waiting is an important part of Witnessing. We have heard some spoken of as having neither physical constitution nor staying power. That which they lack is what we require in spiritual things—power to bear as well as to do, power to suffer, “*Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness.*” But “*He giveth power to the faint*” and to the weak and needy ; and this power may be ours. We may “*wax valiant in fight and turn to flight the armies of the aliens.*” We may “*be strong in the LORD and in the power of His might.*”

May we receive such a view of Christ that we may indeed wait upon Him for the effectual communication of His power to our own souls, that thus He may “*work in us mightily.*”

XIV

DIVINE EQUIPMENT

II. CLOTHING

(July 30, 1888)

COLOSSIANS III. 12-14

"Put on therefore, as the elect of GOD, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ;

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any ; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

IN the subject for the day—DIVINE EQUIPMENT—one point is specially conspicuous, and that is the high standard which is held up to us, as we find it in the words of the 13th verse, "*Even as Christ.*"

The world thinks a great deal of appearances. How much time is bestowed on matters of personal adornment ! And in this matter of Divine Equipment we ought not to be behind it. Let us see that we bestow much time upon this adornment, for we never can discharge our duties unless we are divinely clothed.

And what is this clothing ? The Christian's clothing is in reality his character. The higher his character the better is he equipped.

But how is he to acquire this clothing ?

GOD says to Job (chap. xli. 10) with a kind of Divine irony, "*Array thyself with glory and beauty*;" implying that it was a thing impossible for him. And this was true. Neither can we array ourselves "*with glory and beauty*"; GOD only can do that. He can make us Christ-like. There is nothing so beautiful as the character of the Lord Jesus Christ; the glory of GOD was manifested in Him, and the glory of Jesus Christ is to be made manifest in His people.

Now what GOD requires He bestows; what He commands He enables us to perform, and thus it is He Who gives the garment of glory and beauty. In Exodus xxviii. 40, we read that GOD'S priests were to be in garments "*for glory and for beauty.*" They could not do their work unless they were thus arrayed. It was necessary too that they should be washed, then sprinkled with blood and anointed with oil. So it must be with us. Every true Christian is a priest unto GOD, and he must be divinely clothed. GOD provides the garments.

The most glorious and beautiful of the High Priest's garments was the Ephod, which was made of the same materials as the veil, with this difference—that it was inwrought with gold wire. The veil could be

torn ; it was the type of Christ's humanity (Heb. x. 20), and was rent when He died. The Ephod being made with gold wire could not be torn. It is the type of the Resurrection life of Christ in glory. This "*garment of glory and beauty*" is the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. We are "*to put on the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. xiii. 14), to "*manifest the life also of Jesus*" (2 Cor. vi. 11). HE is to be manifested and seen ; not we. HE is the "*garment of glory and beauty.*" "*Not I, but Christ.*" Thus can it be true for us : "*Even as Christ.*"

Just as the LORD'S supper is an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," so is the character "the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual" life. It is in proportion as we experience His life working in us, that it is made visible in our outward conduct. Notice too that the change of character follows the change of condition. "*Ye have put off*" ; "*Ye have put on.*" The more we realize our change of condition, the more shall we seek to put on the garments of righteousness. It is these which commend Christianity. And we shall never find them anywhere except in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, "*Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

XV

DIVINE EQUIPMENT

III. ARMOUR

(October 29, 1888)

EPHESIANS VI. 10-18

“ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the LORD, and in the power of His might.

“ Put on the whole armour of GOD, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

“ Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of GOD.

“ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

BELIEVERS are addressed here as what is called “The Church Militant.” The true conception of the Church on earth is that of a fighting body. It is not a number of people trying to obtain salvation; but it is those who, having obtained forgiveness—being saved—are constituted, organized into an attacking force.

The Church has lost too much of that attitude, and has forgotten that if she is not acting on the offensive she is in the wrong place. As spiritual Christians, are we not wrong if we forget that it is not for us to be merely on the defensive, but that, as soldiers of Christ, as servants of God, we must ever be acting on the offensive? We are in the enemy's country, not only defending a for-

tress in our own land ; and we are to carry war all round us in that enemy's country. We must be fighting for more progress, more victory, more land, or we have forgotten or misunderstood our position and our duties as "the Church militant here on earth."

Another thought is this, that in order to be fitted for this conflict, this wrestling, we must ourselves first have found rest.

The Apostle opens his Epistle by exhibiting the position of rest given to believers in Christ. He speaks of them as being "*seated with Christ in the Heavenlies.*" Christ puts us at our ease. He takes away all fear of destruction. He brings us into union with Himself in the highest—"in the Heavenlies." But this is in order that we may occupy the only proper ground—the vantage ground on the Rock with Him—for "*fighting the good fight of faith.*" The rest given us in Christ is not merely for repose, that we may "*lie down beside the still waters,*" pleasant as that may be ; but that we may be nerved to "*wrestle,*" to maintain an onward aggressive warfare.

And another thought is, that in order to wear the armour, we must first be "*strong in the LORD.*" The word "*Be strong in the LORD,*" comes before the other, "*Put on the whole armour of GOD.*"

I have sometimes thought, when going through the Tower of London, how much stronger than ourselves the knights of those days must have been, to be able to wear the very heavy suits of armour one sees there. Our soldiers doubtless would be much encumbered in such armour, and in any case it would require a good strong healthy frame to wear it. So, although the armour of which we speak is like wings to a bird, yet we must be "*strong in the LORD*" before we can wear it. And this being "*strong in the LORD*" is through the Holy Ghost: "*strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.*" It is only as we are endued with the Holy Ghost that we are possessed of the "*whole armour of God.*"

I remember a quaint but very apposite expression used by a friend with regard to the promise in Deuteronomy xxxiii., where it is said of Asher, "*Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.*" "Yes," he said, "but he must *dip his foot in oil*" (v. 24) "before he can put them on." You cannot wear the "*shoes*" of "*the preparedness of the Gospel of Peace,*" unless your feet are first dipped in oil. That is, there must first be the baptism of the Holy Spirit before we can wear the armour aright.

Lastly. In the Epistles of St. Paul, there are three references to the armour. The first

is in Romans xiii. 12, where it is called "*the armour of light*." "*Put off the works of darkness, and put on the* ARMOUR OF LIGHT." That seems to be the armour in which we are to fight against the flesh, as described in the verses that follow.

The second is in 2 Corinthians vi. 7: "*The* ARMOUR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS *on the right hand and on the left*"; and there it appears to me to describe the attitude and aspect of the Christian in contact with the world.

Thirdly, there is this passage in Ephesians vi. where it is called "THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD," and is used against the "*wicked spirits in heavenly places*."

Thus: "*The armour of light*" against the flesh; "*The armour of righteousness*" against the world; and "*The whole armour of GOD*" against the devil.

(At the close of the discussion.)

In bringing this subject to a close, let me again draw attention to the necessity for *resting before fighting*.

There is a good illustration of this principle in 2 Chronicles xiv., where it is stated that King Asa had a long period of rest, and *afterwards* "*went out against*" his enemies.

In his prayer to GOD for assistance in the fight, Asa cried, "*Help us, O LORD our GOD,*

for we REST on Thee." Here was internal rest with outward conflict. So with ourselves. If we are "*seated with Christ in heavenly places,*" we can go forward with strength for the conflict.

The passage before us contains the thought of the responsibility laid upon us to "*be strong.*" It would seem a vain thing perhaps to tell a person to be strong; and yet the injunction is, "*Be strong.*" There is an analogous passage in Daniel x. 19. When Daniel was prostrate before the vision of the LORD, the angel said unto him: "*O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be STRONG, yea, BE STRONG. And when He had spoken unto me I was strengthened.*" It was the voice of the LORD which made him strong. The power must be entirely of GOD; and yet we are responsible for *laying hold* of the power.

There is another illustration in the case of Gideon. We are told: "*And the LORD looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might.*" It was the look of the LORD which gave the power.

Let us then like Daniel hear the voice of the LORD, and like Gideon respond to that which He commands. Then shall we know what it is to "*be strong.*"

XVI

THE KEYNOTE OF THE
FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PETER

SUFFERING AND GLORY

(April, 1889)

OUR subject, that of "SUFFERING AND GLORY," is the *keynote of the First Epistle of Peter*. The keynote, I say, because it seems to me to be the prevailing note. There are other lines of thought which pervade the Epistle, but this seems to have the predominance throughout its five chapters.

How important it is in reading a book of the Bible to get hold of the *leading* thought! It is a great assistance in seeking to understand the meaning of the whole book. I think we shall see that this thought of "SUFFERING AND GLORY" is the predominant one here.

The note is soon struck, for we find in the first chapter and sixth verse, that the Apostle

begins by referring to the condition of those to whom he is writing, as that of "*Heaviness through manifold temptations*," in order "*that the trial of*" their "*faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*"

So there is first the allusion to the *suffering* through which they were passing, and then to the "*praise and honour and glory*" at the appearing of their Saviour, to which they were to look forward.

Then immediately he goes on to teach them that the salvation in which they now rejoiced, which prophets had predicted but had not understood, was to be divided into two great parts, connected with "*The SUFFERINGS of Christ*," and "*The GLORY that should follow*" (v. 11). The one precedent, the other consequent.

Dwelling on that thought, he again (v. 21) alludes to the SUFFERINGS of Christ and the GLORY that followed in His case, by saying that "*GOD had raised Him up from the dead, and given Him glory.*"

In the next chapter the "*SUFFERINGS of Christ*" are spoken of twice. First, in verse 21, where it is said that "*Christ SUFFERED*

for us," and again in verse 23, "*Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He SUFFERED He threatened not.*"

Again, in chapter iii. 18: "*For Christ also hath once SUFFERED for sins, the Just for the unjust.*" The GLORY that succeeded these sufferings is described in verse 22: "*Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of GOD: angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*"

In chapter iv. 1, we are again reminded that "*Christ SUFFERED for us in the flesh*"; and in verse 13, Christians are said to be "*partakers of Christ's SUFFERINGS.*"

Lastly, in chapter v. 1, the Apostle declares himself to have been "*a witness of the SUFFERINGS of Christ, and also a partaker of the GLORY that shall be revealed.*"

Thus in how many passages in this short epistle does the apostle dwell on "*The SUFFERINGS of Christ and the GLORY that should follow.*"

But the lot of the Master is declared to be that of the disciple, for "*the servant is not above his Lord,*" and although it may not be the will of GOD that the Church in all places, and at all times, should equally be passing through *Suffering*, yet from a careful study of the Scriptures, we must surely acknow-

ledge that *Suffering* is regarded as the normal condition of the Church in this dispensation. According to Acts ix. 31 there are times when "*the Churches had rest*," and we may thank GOD for the freedom from suffering which the Church has in this land, and at this time.

But still it is true that more or less, at different times and in different places, that condition will have been fulfilled, and that those who stand around the Throne in Glory will be those who "*have come out of the suffering*," "*the great tribulation*"—"great" not only on account of its intensity at a given moment, but because of its extension over a long period of time, sometimes fiercer, sometimes modified ; but all who thus stand will have passed through it.

Therefore we must expect that, if first SUFFERING, and then "*the GLORY that should follow*" are predicted of Christ, so will they also be described as the lot of His servants, *who are called by His name*. Accordingly we shall see that the same thought, as applying to the servants of Christ, runs through the Epistle.

In chapter ii. 21 it is said, "*For even hereunto were ye called*"; and in chapter v. 20, that "*suffering for well doing*" is to be ex-

pected. "*If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with GOD.*"

In chapter iii. 14 it is described as "*Suffering for righteousness' sake,*" and in verse 17 as "*Suffering for well doing.*"

Accordingly, in chapter iv. 1, we are told to prepare ourselves for this lot, by arming ourselves with the mind of Christ, Who "*suffered for us in the flesh*"; and in verses 12 and 14 we are told to accept it, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you ; but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's SUFFERINGS that when His GLORY shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*"

He teaches us also that that glory is anticipated even now. In the verses that follow he alludes to that suffering as consisting in some measure of "*reproach for the name of Christ.*" It need not always be the stake, or the block, or the prison ; it may be ignominy or obloquy of a minor kind. But he says, "*Happy are ye ; for the Spirit of GLORY and of GOD resteth upon you.*" You have got a foretaste of it already, it "*resteth upon you.*"

In the last verse of the fourth chapter, the

Suffering described as "for *righteousness's sake*," and which is "*for well doing*," and "*for Christ's sake*," and to which we "*are called*," is said to be "*According to the will of GOD.*"

In chapter v. 9, it is declared to be "*accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*" It is to be the universal lot. "Do not be surprised ; the same thing is going on elsewhere."

Lastly, in that pregnant passage in verse 10, he beautifully contrasts the shortness and the lightness of the SUFFERING with the eternity and the weight of the GLORY which shall be revealed. "*But the GOD of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal GLORY by Christ Jesus, after that ye have SUFFERED awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*"

We see then in these various and numerous passages, in how very important a sense the KEYNOTE of the whole epistle may be taken to be—"the SUFFERINGS of Christ and the GLORY into which He has entered"; the SUFFERINGS of "*His body the Church*" on earth, in the various phases of its history ; and the issue in that eternal and excellent GLORY which awaits every servant of GOD. And how soon that may be !

To consider these things may strengthen

our faith and encourage our hearts. We know not when we may be called upon to pass through suffering for Christ's sake. That we have so little of it is perhaps due to lack of faithfulness. If we were more unworldly, more Christlike, is there not reason to expect that we should share more of the Master's suffering at the hands of the world? It is still true that "*All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,*" and seeing that things go so easily with us in respect of our profession and practice of Christianity, it must often be a cause of anxious inquiry of our own hearts, whether we are treading as closely in the Master's steps as we ought to be doing.

We are perhaps too prone to take up with a phase of Christianity which in these days is popular, instead of that which characterized Christ, and which *must* entail suffering for *His sake*.

XVII

THE FOUR "INCORRUPTIBLE
THINGS" OF THE FIRST EPISTLE
OF PETER

(July 29, 1889)

I WOULD refer to THE FOUR "INCORRUPTIBLE THINGS" of the First Epistle of Peter, which is our subject to-day, not in the order in which they appear in the Epistle itself—because they have, as it were, to be dug out of it—but in that in which, as it seems to me, it may be more valuable to us to study them.

The first "INCORRUPTIBLE THING," as it appears to my mind, is that spoken of in chapter i. 19: "*The precious blood of Christ.*" We see it to *be* one of the "Incorruptible things" because it is here brought into distinct contrast with the "CORRUPTIBLE *things as silver and gold*" of the previous verse. "*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of*

Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot."

Does not the precious atoning Blood of Christ, incorruptible in its value, lie at the root, at the foundation of everything?

The word "*incorruptible*" is used, here and elsewhere, as denoting that which never changes in value, and never loses it. As we go onward in our pilgrimage, and learn more of what we are—much more than we knew at first—and of our constant need of cleansing by the blood of Christ, oh, how blessed it is to know that that power and that value are as great to-day as when we first came to the Fountain! Surely it is blessed to know that that blood "can never lose its power."

"When we stand before the Throne,
Dressed in beauty not our own ;
When the praise of Heaven we hear,
Loud as thunders to the ear ;"

when we see in the light of GOD'S Throne, and in the light of eternity, what we really are, and yet find ourselves in heaven—oh, how blessed it will be to see and apprehend, in a measure impossible to us before, the incorruptible value of the Blood of Christ! We shall see it in a new light then. The Blood of Christ lies at the foundation of everything.

Now, if we look further in the same chapter

we find in verse 23, the "INCORRUPTIBLE SEED," which is the origin of the new birth in every Christian. "*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of INCORRUPTIBLE, by the word of GOD, which liveth and abideth for ever.*"

The "*word of GOD*" is the *Instrument*, as the Holy Ghost is the *Power*, whereby any sinner is born into the kingdom of GOD. It is an "*incorruptible seed*," and therefore it is the germ, the origin of the incorruptible, the eternal life which we have in Christ.

Our life is eternal because we are begotten "*not of CORRUPTIBLE, but of INCORRUPTIBLE seed.*" The life of him who is born again is an eternal life. As has been well said, "He that is born but once must die twice; but he that has been born twice shall never die." He has everlasting life. Christ is his life; and the word of the Gospel, we are told here, "*endureth for ever.*" How precious then is this INCORRUPTIBLE SEED!

Being then born into the family of GOD, and made "*heirs of GOD, and joint heirs with Christ*," we come naturally to the third INCORRUPTIBLE THING, and that is found in chapter i. 4, the "INHERITANCE INCORRUPTIBLE, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

That is the inheritance of the people of GOD, the children of the Most High ; and it comes into contrast with all earthly inheritances. Here everything changes in value as the market goes up and down. Our earthly inheritances not only change in their value as the price of everything varies here, but they may be altogether lost. Not so there ; no fluctuations, no changes come in the value of the heavenly inheritance ; it is unchangeable.

This is beautifully described here under three figures : First, it is *incorruptible* ; it cannot deteriorate ; it never loses its intrinsic value.

Then it is "*undefiled*." There is no sin there. How precious does this make it ! To be in a world where sin is unknown, where there is no possibility of sinning, where there is no temptation, no possibility of grieving our Heavenly Father, how blessed ! Here every inheritance is marred by something that defiles ; that is an inheritance "*undefiled*."

Then it is "*unfading*." Unlike earthly beauty, whether of human being or lovely flower, which passes away, the beauty of that inheritance can never fade. No breath of decay can pass over that scene. Living as we do in a changing dying world, seeing

the glory of man and of everything else passing away, how blessed it is to think of the “*unfading*” beauty of that inheritance !

The fourth “INCORRUPTIBLE THING” is found in the third chapter, 4th verse, and in one sense it seems the best of all. It is the INCORRUPTIBLE CHARACTER of the redeemed, the “*meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of GOD of great price.*”

The apostle is speaking here particularly to women, but what he says is equally applicable to men—to all who profess His name and who desire to follow His example, “*Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning, . . . but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is NOT CORRUPTIBLE, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of GOD of great price.*”

The Lord Jesus said, “*I am meek and lowly in heart,*” and the believer instinctively longs to be like Him. He had a meek and quiet spirit. St. Paul uses this fact as one of his strongest adjurations when he says, “*I beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*” How foreign to our nature is this “*meek and quiet spirit*” ; but it is the character which brings great blessing with it. It is not easily attained. “*Take My yoke upon*

you, and learn of ME," is the word of Christ. The man after GOD'S own heart said, "*I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child.*" But the process of weaning is trying. How different to the quiet condition of the child that is weaned! Ah! a great deal, perhaps most of the discipline through which our Heavenly Father leads us, is to produce this "*incorruptible*" character. It took Moses forty years in the wastes of the desert before his fiery nature was subdued. But after that it was said of him, "*The man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.*"

XVIII

THE SIX "CONVERSATIONS" OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

(October 28, 1889)

LET me read to you the six descriptions of the "CONVERSATIONS" referred to in this First Epistle of St. Peter. The Greek word translated "conversation" signifies "*a turning upside down, a turning about in a place ; hence conduct, manner of life,*" reminding us of the expression in Zechariah x. 12, "*They shall walk up and down in His Name.*" The term is inclusive of all we do and say in our daily life on earth.

In chapter i. 18, we are said to have been "*Redeemed from our VAIN CONVERSATION.*"

In the 15th verse we have the definition of the redeemed life, in its relation to GOD: "*As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye HOLY IN ALL MANNER OF CONVERSATION ; Because it is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy,*" a complete change from the "*vain conversation.*"

In chapter ii. 12, the aspect of our daily

life, as seen by the world, is dwelt upon : *"Having your CONVERSATION HONEST among the Gentiles."* The world must not have any real occasion for speaking against the children of GOD. Daniel's worst enemies could not find any occasion of complaint against him, *"except concerning the law of his GOD."*

In chapter iii. 1, 2, we have that beautiful description of an ATTRACTIVE CONVERSATION. The believing wife, not so much by *talking* to her unbelieving husband as by *living* before him, is to be so attractive that by this influence he is to be "WON," *"While they behold your CHASTE CONVERSATION coupled with fear."*

Is there not a need for this influence in our family circles? Do we not all know some unconverted one whom we could thus influence and attract? Do we fully realize that religion must begin at home?

It is easy to be pleasant at a prayer-meeting or on a platform ; but does your religion make you pleasant and attractive at home?

In verse 16 the "GOOD CONVERSATION" of the Christian is connected with "a good conscience." A good conscience is manifested in a good life. You cannot be living right if your conscience is bad. On the other hand, you will not go far wrong in life if your con-

science—that is, your enlightened conscience—is good.

And lastly, let us notice that it is said in the end of this 16th verse, that this "*good conversation*" is to be "*in Christ*." It is said in Colossians ii. 6, "*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so WALK YE IN HIM.*"

XIX

THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL PRAYER

(July 28, 1890)

REVELATION VIII. 3, 4

"And another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer ; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

"And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before GOD out of the Angel's hand."

UNDER the symbolism and imagery of these verses we can discern the great and glorious reality of what is now taking place in the unseen courts on high. What an encouragement it is to remember, when assembled together as now, or when in private we adore and seek the face of our Father in heaven, that though we cannot see this transaction, it is none the less really taking place on high ! For surely this Angel to whom the "*much incense*" is given, "*that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints,*" represents none other than the great Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom alone it appertains to present the

prayers and the praises of the "Church Militant here on earth." He is the Advocate at the right hand of the Majesty on High ; *He* is the everlasting Intercessor, by Whose mediation and worth and excellence our offering of praise and supplication alone finds acceptance.

But inasmuch as the prayers of the saints are here wrapped up and lost sight of, so to speak, in the sweet savour of the incense which is in the Angel's hands—as it was in the hands of the earthly priest in the Tabernacle—so we learn that our petitions are so enveloped in the worthiness, in the acceptability of the work and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they do continually ascend up before GOD out of His hand. As we find in Revelation v. 8, they are so identified with that sweet savour, that the "*golden vials full of odours*" are said actually to denote the very "*prayers of the saints.*"

How wonderful is this ! how encouraging ! If we analyze our prayers, how imperfect they are, how sin-stained ! When did we ever rise from our knees, but with a sense of humiliation because of the imperfection of our worship, the defilement of our holy things ? How marvellous that they should here be called "*sweet odours*" ! It is not because of

their earnestness or eloquence ; not because they are devoid of imperfection, but it is because of the savour of the "*much incense*" in the hands of the great Angel.

David, in the 141st Psalm, apprehends this glorious truth when he says, "*Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*" These verses, in the truth which they embody and express, form a helpful and fitting introduction to our meeting for prayer. When thus we unite in worshipping our Father in heaven ; when we can pour out our hearts and make our common supplication before Him, we may realize that our prayers and supplications, although so sin-stained and unworthy, do yet find acceptance with GOD. And thus, as we ourselves are "*accepted in the Beloved*," do the utterances that come from our hearts, dictated and prompted by the Spirit of the living GOD Who "*helpeth our infirmities*," ascend up to our Father's ears. And we know that because of the "*much incense*"—the perfect merit of Him Who is our Head, and Who "*ever liveth to make intercession for us*"—those prayers are accepted before our GOD, and are answered.

XX

REASONS FOR VALUING THE
WORD OF GOD

(October, 1890)

“**R**EASONS for valuing the Word of GOD!” What can I say? Why, it seems to me that one might as well advance reasons for valuing the air we breathe, the food we eat, the light we see. It is not merely something to be valued, but it is *indispensable*.

It is the cause of my life, the source of my life. “*Thy Word hath quickened me.*” “*Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth.*” We should have no life but for His Word. We should be without food for our souls; we should be like mariners without a compass, or travellers without a chart—dark, hopeless, and helpless.

Oh, well may we say, “*How love I Thy law!*” Every one of us has proved the power of that Word. We are present here because we have felt its power in our own souls.

We know that if we stint ourselves in our allowance of GOD'S Word, our souls are starved ; we are straitened, and become crippled. We can no more do without it than a soldier can dispense with his weapons, or a miner with his tools. What should we do without its warnings and its promises ?

Oh, what a foundation it is ! We cannot live a day without the Word of GOD ; if we try to do it, we lose a day. If I have not that Word as the foundation of my hopes, I am hopeless. If I have it not as a pillow on which to lay my dying head, I die without hope.

It has been described as " The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture." It is indeed a Rock which has been often attacked, and in these last days the attacks seem to wax more bitter and more persistent. Advanced criticism, miscalled the higher, is met everywhere. You find it in your newspaper, in your magazines, everywhere.

These are days in which we need to have a firmer grip than ever of the Word of God. We want to be like Eleazar, one of David's "*three mighty men*" of whom we read in 2 Sam. xxiii. 10, who took such a grip of his sword that "*his hand clave unto it*," and they could not unclench his fingers. If Satan can

get GOD'S Word out of our grip, he will lead us into paths of error. May GOD then give to us a deeper value for His blessed Word. Let us treasure it, lay it up in our hearts, and use it more. Do we value it in any sense as we ought? Is it not often supplanted by other and unnecessary reading? There are great temptations in this direction; our other reading must not edge out the Word of GOD. Do we not find time for a great deal of literature of a kind that we shall regret when we come to review life at the end of it?

You that are younger in life, starting in your career, suffer a word from one who has passed a good deal of his life in the public service. Cultivate a habit of such a deep prayerful study of the Word of GOD, that it shall make you like those of whom John wrote (1 John ii. 14): "*I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of GOD abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*"

XXI

WE WILL—HE WILL

(January, 1891)

PSALM XX

"The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble ; the name of the GOD of Jacob defend thee.

"Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion.

"Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice ; Selah.

"Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.

"We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our GOD we will set up our banners : the Lord fulfil all thy petitions.

"Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed ; He will hear him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand.

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses ; but we will remember the name of the Lord our GOD.

"They are brought down and fallen : but we are risen, and stand upright.

"Save, Lord ; let the King hear us when we call."

I HAVE been thinking of this "WE WILL" of Christian determination, and the "HE WILL" of Divine encouragement which are brought out in this Psalm ; and I would just observe that the one is of no good without the other.

You will notice that three times it is said "*We will.*" There is, perhaps, nothing better than Christian resolution.

"WE WILL rejoice in Thy salvation. In the

name of our GOD WE WILL set up our banners. WE WILL remember the name of the LORD our GOD."

There is a familiar hymn in which, in response to a supposed appeal from the Lord Jesus Christ, "Hold the fort, for I am coming," the reply is given, "By Thy grace *we will.*"

We meet here to-day, dear friends, as those who have taken this attitude, and are determined that, by the grace of GOD, that answer shall go back from us to Heaven; that "*WE WILL rejoice in that salvation; that, "in the name of our GOD, WE WILL set up our banners"*; and that "*WE WILL remember the name of the LORD our GOD.*"

As Christians we mean nothing less; and certainly we are sacramentally pledged to nothing short of it before heaven and earth.

But of what value is our "I WILL"? How often has our resolution broken down, and we have found it weak as water!

The true secret of Christian determination is to recognise, to remember, that at the back of our "*I will*" we have "*He will.*" In verse 6 we have the promise, "*HE WILL hear him from His holy heaven.*"

It is He who begins the good work in us, and carries it on, and completes it. All

Christian resolution, like every Christian prayer, begins with GOD and ends with GOD. Christian resolution is the middle link in a chain of which GOD Himself is the Author and Finisher, the Alpha and Omega. It is because He prompts and inspires prayer that we have the assurance that He will hear and answer it.

And so whenever we are inclined to take a forward step, to make a stedfast stand, to attempt anything for His Name, to resist evil, or to do good, we have the comforting assurance that it is because of His inspiration of our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Therefore, as I said, at the back of every "*I will*" of thought or action there lies the "*He will*" of Christ Himself.

The same thought comes out in this Psalm in the twofold *Remembrance*. In verse 7 it is said, "*We will REMEMBER the name of the LORD our GOD;*" and in verse 3 *He* is spoken of as remembering too: "*REMEMBER all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.*" If ever you remember anything good, anything of GOD, anything inspiring and encouraging, it is because the Holy Ghost, Whose office it is "*to bring all things to remembrance,*" has thus led and directed your thoughts.

XXII

CHRISTIANS, LIVING STONES

(April, 1891)

I PETER II. 5

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to GOD by Jesus Christ."

IN the description given in 1 Kings vi. of the preparation which was made by David for the building of the Temple, it is said in the seventh verse, "*And the house when it was in building was built of stone, made ready before it was brought thither.*"

"*Made ready!*" What great truths lie hidden in these words! Every living stone has need of polishing. The hand of the great Master Workman has been preparing every living stone. First the stones have to be brought out from the darkness, from Nature's quarry; and although GOD works through instruments, yet it is He Himself who hews them out. David "*set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of GOD*" (1 Chron. xxii. 2). All the discipline of life, domestic anxieties, official worries—all is used

by GOD for His work in making ready the stones. A great many corners have to be knocked off, the rough sides have to be chiselled down, and the experience is not pleasant, but painful. Yet it is only in this way that we can learn the lessons, and go through the training that will qualify us to fill our right place in the spiritual temple. How blessed to realize what a loving wise hand is continually at work in the polishing process ! And that process implies the nearness of the Polisher, the impress of the Master's hand.

When we attempt to do the work of polishing upon each other we often make mistakes. We say the wrong thing, and do harm where we desired to do good ; but the Master Workman makes no mistakes. He gives the right blow, with just the right force, and in just the right direction. He chips off useless pieces, though we often don't understand the reason why they should be removed. When a diamond is being wrought, the facet must have just the proper angle in order that it may give forth the fullest brilliancy, and the workman must remove all that would interfere with this object.

When we are under His hand—and it is doubtless the lot of each of us to be dis-

ciplined, tried—let us seek to remember whose Hand it is that is doing the work.

In Deuteronomy xxvii. 4-8 it is said that GOD directed that when Israel went over Jordan an altar of stone should be built. This was done by Joshua. There were two remarkable features about this altar. First, the stones were to be joined together very closely with the proper cement. So it is with the living stones. They are to be joined together, not only to the Living Stone, but to one another, and the only power which can cement is the unction of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the altar was to be inscribed with all the law of GOD written "*very plainly.*"

As "living stones" we ought to express the law of GOD very plainly. There should be no mistake as to Whose we are and Whom we serve. The purpose of our calling is to "*shew forth*" His praises. We are to be living embodiments of all His law, "*epistles of Christ,*" written very plainly by the Spirit of GOD.

The flashing jewels in the breastplate of the High Priest were, as nearly as was possible, "*living stones.*" They reflected the *Shekinah*.

The breastplate with these stones was bound to the Ephod with laces of blue and chains of gold, and was never to be loosed

from it. It was bound to the very heart of the High Priest. So the Lord Jesus Christ cannot lay one of His Jewels aside ; they are bound to the heart of Christ. "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" Nothing shall "*separate us from the love of CHRIST.*" Moreover, each of the stones in the breastplate had a distinct glory. Each flashed with a different colour, but they all reflected the same light. So with the spiritual stones. They may have very different qualities, but all must give forth the same light—" *the glory of GOD in the face of Jesus Christ.*"

XXIII

CHRISTIANS, LIVING EPISTLES

(July 27, 1891)

2 CORINTHIANS III. 2

"Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

[NOTES SENT]

CHRIST was God's Living Epistle to the world. He manifested the Name, the Character, the Heart of GOD. "*The Life was the Light*" (John i. 4). He was "*The Word*."

So Christians are to be GOD'S living epistles to the world, to "*manifest the life of Jesus*" (2 Cor. iv. 10, 11). Their lives are to be "*the light of the world*" (Matt. v. 14).

The world will not read the Bible, but must read the Christian life—the "*living epistle of Christ*." Therefore we must be—

I. LIVING, alive—not "*tables of stone*," nor bits of musty parchment; but breathing, because in-breathed of GOD; having the

"*abundant life*" of Christ in us—walking advertisements. The *Life* must speak. It was the fact that Lazarus was *alive* that attracted the Jews—not what he said, but what he was—a *living* man, "*alive from the dead*," a resurrection man. We have not one word that he said.

The Shunammite said of Elisha (2 Kings iv. 19), "*I perceive that this is an holy man of GOD.*" It was not what he had said that made her feel this; as he was "*passing by*" he left on her that impression. It was his walk more than his talk. It is when the Gentiles "*DO the things contained in the Law*" that they "*SHOW the work of the law written in their hearts*" (Rom. ii. 14, 15).

We are to "*BE to the praise* of His glory" (Eph. i. 12), not merely to talk or sing His praise. Then the world will believe and know that GOD hath sent His Son (John xvii. 21, 23).

II. LEGIBLE. As the writing of the Law on the stones of the altar was to be "*very plain*" (Deut. xxvii. 8), so the writing on the "*fleshy tables of the heart*" must be "*very plain*" also. Paul said, "*We use GREAT PLAINNESS of speech*" (2 Cor. iii. 12); "*By MANIFESTATION of the truth*" (2 Cor. iv. 2).

Many Christians are illegible—cuneiform

writings—people cannot make them out; brasses on a Church pavement, obliterated by the feet of the world—blotted and blurred by inconsistencies; coins defaced, worn so that their image and superscription cannot be deciphered. Thus, because illegible, they are unintelligible, and convey no distinct meaning; letters with undecipherable addresses, which have to be returned—useless.

Not so the saints of old. They “*declared PLAINLY*” (Heb. xi. 14). They were “*known and read of all men.*” “*MANIFESTLY declared to be the epistles of Christ.*” What a declaration! What an honour! What a miracle of grace!

How is this brought about?

I. By the “*Spirit of the Living GOD.*” He is the writer. He Who wrote the Law and the Prophets, the Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles continues to write. He writes “*Epistles of Christ*” still, living letters, fresh editions.

II. The substance written upon is exposed to the light—“*the glory of the LORD*” (2 Cor. iii. 18). It is by beholding “*the glory of GOD in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor. iv. 6) that His character is reflected in us, and that we “*are changed into the same image.*”

THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

(April, 1892)

REVELATION II. 1-7

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write ; These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil ; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars :

"And hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen ; and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of GOD."

I LIKE to call this the Second Epistle to the Ephesians.

It is very interesting and instructive to read this Second Epistle in the light of the First ; for there was no Church to which so much had been written about the love of Christ. St. Paul had prayed that they might

be "*rooted and grounded in love*"; but here we read, "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" It is to those very people who evidently had abounded in love, that the voice of the Spirit now comes with searching power, telling of the wounded heart of Christ, "*I have somewhat against thee.*" They had fallen from their love to Him.

What the LORD calls the *fall* of the Ephesian Church is not what men understand by a fall. We think of a fall as something patent, something external, some grievous breach of consistency; but Christ regards coldness of heart as a fall: "*Remember from whence thou art fallen.*"

His first love had not declined. It is beautiful to notice how this love is described in Scripture. In Jeremiah xxxi. 3 it is called "*An everlasting love.*" In Canticles viii. 6, 7 it is said to be "*Strong as death,*" and to have "*a most vehement flame*"—literally, "*the fire flame of Jehovah.*" It is tenacious; it never lets go of what it grasps. "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it*" (Cant. viii. 7). What a blessing that all the cold water that has been thrown upon it has not quenched it yet!

Again in Ephesians iii. 19 it is said to be a love "*which basset knowledge*"; and in

chapter v. we see it manifested in the gift of Himself in order to win our love.

Such was His love to them ; but such was not their love to Him. What about ours ?

It is to those very Ephesian believers that the LORD now says, "*Thou hast left thy first love.*"

Look at Jeremiah ii. 2 : "*I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness.*" The Bridegroom looks back on those days of early communion, of peace and life and joy of salvation, and now, what a change ! "I remember," He would say, "when I was the supreme Object of your affection ; when you were ready to give up everything for My sake ; when you felt the power of the atoning Blood, and your heart went out after Me." How touchingly He appeals in verse 10 : "*They have forsaken Me*"; and in verse 32, "*Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire ? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.*"

Again, in Hosea iii. 2, the prophet is commanded to "*love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress ; according to the love of the LORD towards the children of Israel.*" Departure from Christ is adultery with the world. But we are loved, though unfaithful.

See how He pleads in chapter xi. 8: "*How shall I give thee up?*" "You have let Me go, but I cannot let you go; you have fallen from your love, but My love remains the same."

It is this mighty constant invariable love of Christ which should bring us back to our first love. May we hear His voice as He says: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear.*" "*Remember*"; "*Repent*"; "*Return.*"

Failure in love involves failure in light. Where love grows cold, light goes out. There may be orthodoxy, and He values it; there may be zeal and labour. But as in the home life, if the first love is chilled, outward circumstances may appear right, the arrangements of the house may be perfect, but that is not enough. If love is wanting, the light of the house has gone out.

GOD help us in this matter! May it be with us as was said of one, "His life was not so wonderful for what he did, as for the love he put into it."

XXV

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

(July 25, 1892)

REVELATION II. 8-11

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive;

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

THE Epistle to the Church in Smyrna is the shortest of the epistles to the Seven Churches.

Perhaps the name conveys to us an idea of the subject of the Epistle. *Smyrna* and *Myrrh* come from the same root, and Archbishop Trench observes that it “may well represent the pressed, bruised condition of the suffering Church, giving out sweet fragrance to her LORD.”

The main subjects of the Epistle may be described as

TRIBULATION,
TRIAL,
TRIUMPH.

Of all the Seven Epistles, it speaks most of *life* and *death*. That seems one of its leading thoughts. Our LORD refers to Himself as the One Who had been *dead* and was *alive*. Again, He says, "*Be thou faithful unto DEATH, and I will give thee a crown of LIFE.*" Again, "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second DEATH.*" *Death* and *life* are thus put in contrast the one to the other, in our LORD'S person, in His people's present position, and in their future prospects.

Poverty and *riches* are also contrasted: "*I know thy POVERTY, but thou art RICH.*" It is interesting to compare this with the exactly opposite condition of the last of the Seven Churches: "*Thou sayest, I am RICH . . . and knowest not that thou art . . . POOR.*" Blessed are those "*poor*" concerning whom their LORD can say, "*But thou art RICH.*"

There is another thing noticeable in this Epistle, and that is the testimony given by our LORD Himself to the reality of the existence and work of the enemy of souls.

He speaks of Satan as a person: "*The Synagogue of SATAN*"; "*The DEVIL shall cast some of you into prison.*"

These are days when on all hands the

personality of Satan is denied. He has a great purpose in leading men thus to disbelieve in his existence—in himself—it is that he may the more effectually bring them under his sway. But let us remember how plainly the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about the work and the character of the great enemy of souls.

Let us now consider the "TRIBULATION" which was to come to the Church of Smyrna : *"Ye shall have TRIBULATION ten days. Fear none of those things which thou shalt SUFFER."*

Many have held that these Seven Epistles fit into seven successive periods in the history of the Church militant here on earth. There is a great deal to confirm that view ; and it is a very interesting one, though I do not suppose it can be held dogmatically. This Epistle, however, occurring as it does second in point of order, certainly agrees admirably with this theory. For it would be just about the time when the last and greatest persecution under the Pagan-Roman Empire—that of Diocletian—took place. That persecution lasted exactly ten years, from A.D. 303 to A.D. 313, the latter being the date of the Edict of Milan. If this be so, the year-day theory of interpretation

would receive a confirmation. There is one very comforting thought which we may gather, and that is, that the tribulation and the sufferings of GOD'S servants are all measured. There is not a moment too much, and there is not a moment too little.

In the closing chapters of the book of Ezekiel, there is a frequent repetition of the expression, "*He measured.*" The Man with the measuring reed is still measuring about us. He weighs, He takes accurate knowledge of our trials, our sufferings, our tribulations; every one of them is marked out in the Divine plan from all eternity. None can ever last too long. They all have their appointed termination, and the Lord knows the time that is best for us. So He says: "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.*" It is difficult to do this. When at times we look ahead and see waves rising in the distance, we are ready to tremble. But the end is an appointed one.

And what is that end? The TRIAL of faith: "*That ye may be tried.*" When GOD gives faith, GOD tries that faith. As in the case of Abraham, we are told "GOD did *tempt*," or try Abraham; and what blessed results accrued from that trial! So it was with Job. We know "*the end of the Lord*"

in his case ; and the end of all trial is to test the gold, to try the ore, to bring out the reflection of the Master's likeness. To remember that testing—trying—is the end and the purpose of tribulation, may help us to bear trial when it comes.

And, lastly, let us think of the TRIUMPH :
“ *Shall not be hurt of the second death.*” “ *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” The “ *Crown of glory*” is several times mentioned in Scripture, and also the “ *Crown of righteousness.*” The “ *Crown of life*” is again, in the Epistle of James, associated with trial. There we read :
“ *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.*”

May the thought of the coming triumph cheer us on to endure through times of tribulation and trial, till that day when the LORD will fulfil His promise and give “ *the crown of life to them that love Him.*”

XXVI

“THEY THAT FEARED THE
LORD”

(December 8, 1892)

MALACHI III. 16-18

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another; and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His Name.

“And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth GOD, and him that serveth Him not.”

NOTES.

(Sent when unable to attend the meeting through illness.)

THESE words were written in days of abounding iniquity; it was then that informal gatherings took place of those who, in the midst of the evil, remained loyal to the LORD.

Let us notice the CHARACTERISTICS of the persons who thus met together.

They were those who “*feared the LORD.*” We do not hear this expression used so much nowadays as formerly. It has become rather old-fashioned. Perhaps the great spread of Christianity in recent years has not been so deep as it has been wide.

Then, they were those whose *delight was in the LORD*—not merely in things concerning Him, not in their work for Him, but in Himself. They “*thought upon His Name.*”

They are also spoken of as those who “*served God.*”

The PRIVILEGES bestowed upon them by GOD are next enumerated.

They had His *Presence.*

They had His *Ear*: “*The LORD hearkened and heard.*”

They had His *Recollection.* How blessed to have our names, not only in the Book of Life, but in the Book of God’s Remembrance—in the list of those who, amid times of defection and unfaithfulness, cleave unto Him and meet together to “*think upon His Name*”!

Then they had His *Favour*: “*They shall be Mine.*” So of us it is said: “*Ye belong to Christ.*”

They had also His *Special Care*: He calls them His jewels, His peculiar treasure.

They had *Light in the Darkness*—“*the Sun of Righteousness*” arose upon them.

And lastly, there was the privilege of a *Special Revival* in their souls; for this glorious Sun, the Source of life and heat and of all blessing, was to arise upon them “*with healing in His wings.*”







